Big Ideas For This Lesson

Metaphors are a reflection of reality. When it comes to metaphors, simple tends to be best. This lesson introduces a simple metaphor that you and your students can use to integrate the concepts of Lizard-Wizard Brain, Emotions, Mindfulness, and Coping Skills. It also provides a fun opportunity for students to connect with SEL concepts through art.

The basis of the metaphor is this: Your brain can be thought of as a boat sailing on the ocean. The ocean represents your emotions and experiences – sometimes calm, sometimes wavy, and sometimes flat-out stormy. The boat itself represents your lizard-brain – the part of your brain that is reactive and easily tossed around on the currents and waves of your emotions. No good ship would be complete without a captain, however, also known as your wizard-brain. It takes a wise captain to steer a ship through a storm and to know when it is time to drop the anchor. The anchor represents mindfulness – the simple act of grounding oneself in the present moment even in the face of stormy waters. Each of the three prongs of the anchor represents the three anchors of mindfulness - breath, body, and sound. The metaphor of the anchor can be extended to include any coping skill that helps to anchor you in the present moment.

So, while your students will not be learning any new concepts in this lesson, it is a great way to bring it all together in one simple drawing. Get creative, have fun, and dive in to the metaphor with your students!

Essential Vocabulary

Anchor/Boat/Captain/Waves
Coping Skills
Emotions
Lizard-Brain
Metaphor
Mindfulness
Wizard-Brain

Materials

- Whiteboard or poster paper to draw on.
- Drawing materials (paper/pencil or crayons, markers, colored pencils) for each student.
Preparation
1. Familiarize yourself with anchor/captain/boat drawing.
2. Be prepared to review lizard-wizard brain concepts.

Teaching Script
BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE & CONCEPT MODELING (I DO)

**Teaching Note:** Concept modeling and guided practice will be integrated in this lesson into an interactive teaching/drawing exercise. As you introduce each concept, students will be following along with their own drawing. Start with a brief review of lizard-wizard brain and then dive into the drawing.

Today we are going to make a drawing! First, let’s make sure we remember the difference between our Lizard-Brain and our Wizard-Brain. Can anyone tell me what the Lizard-Brain does?

Call on a student to share about the Lizard-Brain

That’s right! The lizard-brain is the part of our brain that keeps us safe and deals with intense emotions like anger and fear.

Can anyone tell me what the Wizard-Brain does?

Call on a student to share about the Wizard-Brain.

Correct! The Wizard-Brain is the thinking part of our brain that helps us to make responsible choices, calm down, and control our actions.

Our drawing today is going to help us understand how our lizard-wizard brain, our emotions, mindfulness, and coping skills are all related. Let’s get started!

If you have not already done so, ensure that each student has drawing materials to follow along and that you have a whiteboard or poster paper to model the drawing.
GUIDED PRACTICE (WE DO)

The first thing we will draw is a boat. We’ll keep it really simple, just like this:

Draw a simple boat on the board (below) and provide time for students to do the same.

This boat is a lot like our lizard-brain. It keeps us afloat, but without any direction or someone to steer the ship it can easily go off course and get tossed around by the waves.

Speaking of waves, let’s add some to our drawing.

Add waves to the drawing.

If the boat is like our lizard-brain, then the waves are a lot like our emotions. Imagine that your mind is floating on an ocean of emotions; sometimes the sea is very calm and peaceful, sometimes it can be a little wavy, and sometimes there are BIG storms that really rock your boat. Just like real waves in the ocean, it is important to remember that these emotions come and go and are always changing.

If our emotions are like ocean waves – sometimes calm, sometimes stormy – then we will definitely need someone to steer our boat. Does anyone know what we call someone who is in charge of a boat?
Allow students to respond.

- Yes – we need a captain!

Draw a simple captain.

The captain of our boat represents our wizard-brain; she decides what to do, which direction the ship will go, and how to keep the ship going in stormy waters. Without a captain, our boat would surely sink!

Now that we have our boat, our captain, and the waves, there is one thing we are missing. Does anyone know what captains use to keep their boat in one place?

Allow students to guess.

- We need an anchor!

Draw a simple anchor.
When the waves get too rough, a smart captain knows when to drop the anchor to keep the boat from going too far off course or sinking. The anchor represents our mindfulness skills. When our emotions (waves) start to feel really stormy and out of control we can use our wizard-brain (captain) to decide to ‘drop our anchor’ by using mindfulness.”

Let's label our drawing so we don’t forget, and then we will practice dropping our anchors.

Label the drawing as pictured below.
REINFORCING LESSON CONCEPTS (YOU DO)

Now that we understand how all of the pieces of our drawing fit together, we are going to practice ‘dropping our anchors.’ When it comes to mindfulness, there are three anchors we can use: mindful breathing, mindful body, and mindful listening. In any situation, if we can remember to pause, breathe, listen, and feel into our body it will help us to keep our boat from sinking. Let’s try it!

Guide a brief mindfulness practice in “Dropping Your Anchor.” Use the script below as a starting point, or decide on your own language to help students connect with the experience.

Close your eyes and remember a time when you felt a difficult emotion that really rocked your boat. Imagine this emotion as a wave on the ocean, tossing your boat around and throwing you off course. Notice what it feels like in your body and any thoughts or memories that come to mind when you feel this emotion.

With your eyes still closed, use your wizard-brain (captain) to decide to drop your anchor. There are three simple steps to dropping your anchor:

1. First, take 1-3 deep breaths, noticing how each breath relaxes your body.
2. Second, listen to the sounds around you, still with your eyes closed.
3. Third, do a quick body scan to notice any tension or stress still in your body.

Continue to breathe deeply until you can feel the stress and tension in your body beginning to relax. That’s it! All it takes to drop your anchor is to breathe, listen, and notice how your body feels. You can use this anytime you start to feel overwhelmed by your emotions. Try it one more time on your own – when I say “Drop your anchor,” I want you to pause, take a deep breath, listen, and notice how your body feels.

Ready? Drop your anchor!

Allow some time for students to practice dropping their anchors.

As time allows, facilitate a discussion about other ways students can drop their anchor. Any coping skill¹ ² ³ that grounds you in the present moment is a form of ‘dropping your anchor.’ Brainstorm ideas with your students, keeping the focus on skills that can be used at any time and encouraging students to write their own list in their journals.

I am going to use the phrase “Drop Your Anchor” as a reminder whenever I notice that you seem overwhelmed or that your lizard-brain is taking over. Whenever I say “drop your anchor,” that is your reminder to take a deep breath and use your mindfulness skills and coping skills to calm down.”
Remember: it is up to you (the captain) to decide when to drop your anchor. Ships are made to explore and travel the ocean, so we can’t stay anchored all of the time. When we use our wizard-brain, however, we know that our anchor is always available. We can always pause, breathe, listen, and notice our body.

EVIDENCE OF CONCEPT ATTAINMENT

Reflect on it

- Summarize each part of the drawing – What does the boat represent? The captain? The waves? The anchor?
- What does it mean to “drop your anchor”?
- What are some examples of different “waves” (emotions) you often feel? Are they big or small waves?
- What are other ways beside mindfulness to ‘drop your anchor’?

Journal it

- What are your top 5 anchoring strategies?
- Draw a detailed picture in your journal about what the “Ocean of your Mind” looks like. Include a drawing of your boat/captain (your mind) your waves (emotions) and your anchor (coping skills).

EXTENSIONS

Classroom

- Post the attached “Dropping Your Anchor” poster in the cool down area to remind students how to drop their anchor.
- Cue students as needed to “drop their anchor”. Consider developing a hand signal (e.g., placing your hand on your stomach) to help cue escalated students.
- Incorporate dropping your anchor and visualizations into your daily routine.

School-wide

- Post reminders or attached poster in public spaces.
- Create an interactive “Coping Skills/Anchoring” poster that students can add ideas to and post in a public space.
- Incorporate anchoring strategies and moments into your staff meetings and/or school-wide assemblies.


How to drop your anchor:

1. **Pause.** Stop what you’re doing and take a break.
2. **Take 1 – 3 deep breaths**
3. **Listen to the sounds around you**
4. **Notice how your body feels.**